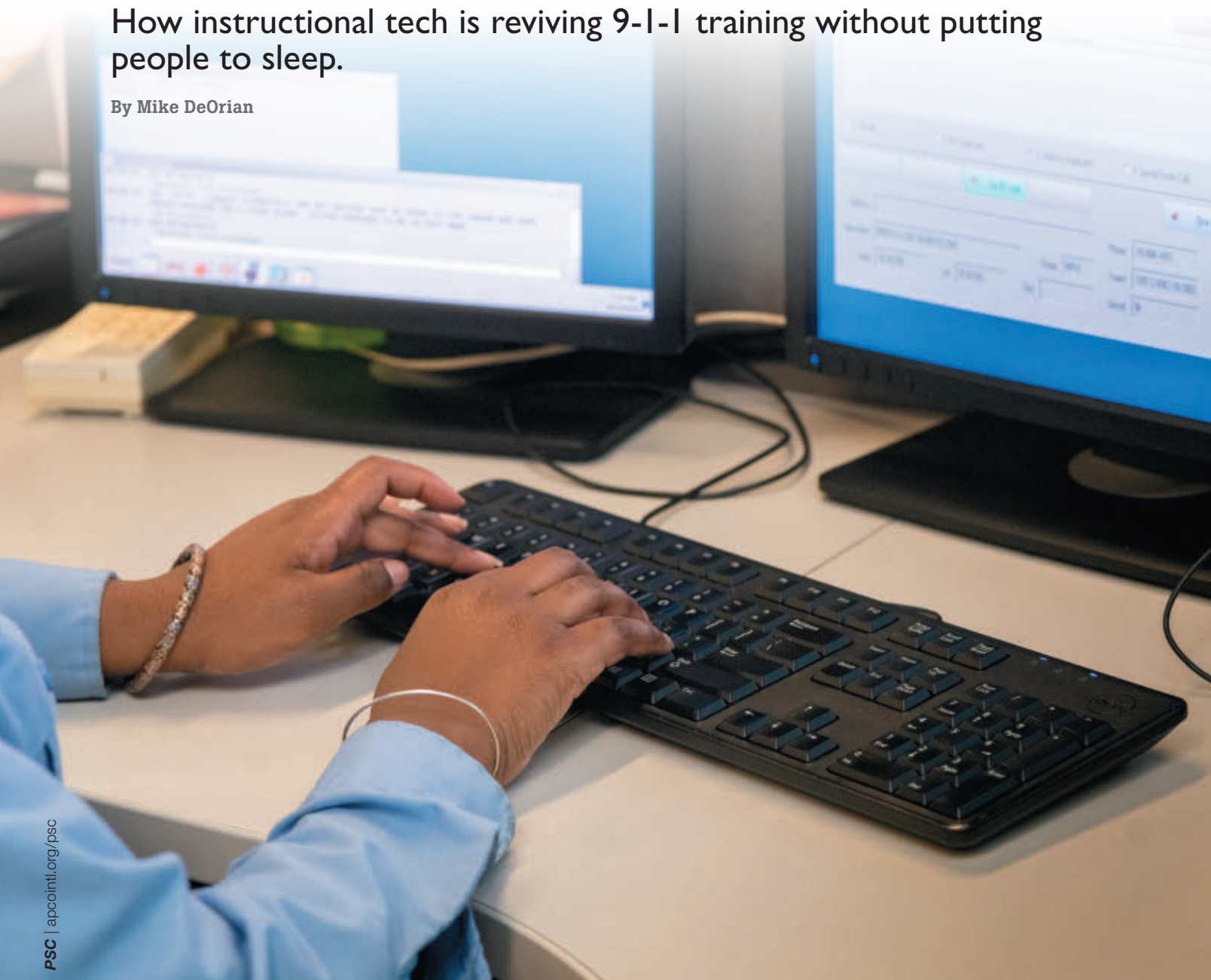


LOGGING IN, NOT TUNING OUT

How instructional tech is reviving 9-1-1 training without putting people to sleep.

By Mike DeOrian



Let's be honest: traditional 9-1-1 training methods often rely on dry policy lectures, aging PowerPoints and binders that could double as doorstops. But in a field as dynamic as emergency communications, we need training that reflects the real-time, high-stakes environment our teams work in every day. Enter instructional technology: an ever-evolving toolkit of platforms, simulations and creative content delivery that can make learning more engaging, effective and — dare I say it — fun.

This article is a hands-on guide for 9-1-1 leaders, trainers and front line staff looking to upgrade their training game. We'll explore how to implement instructional tech affordably, what tools are making an impact and how you can bring the classroom to life, whether your learners are rookies in an academy or veterans between calls.

WHY INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY MATTERS

9-1-1 telecommunicators operate under immense pressure. Training needs to be more than informative; it must be realistic, repeatable and adaptable. Instructional tech allows agencies to:

- Provide consistent training across shifts and locations.
- Offer scalable learning for agencies of any size.
- Simulate critical incident response without the risk.
- Reinforce learning with interactive tools and real-time feedback.

Most importantly, it creates opportunities to learn in ways that mirror how today's workforce processes information: visually, interactively and on demand.

TECH THAT DOESN'T BREAK THE BUDGET

When people hear "instructional technology," they may imagine costly software or fancy virtual reality setups. But many effective tools are free or low-cost:

- Google Workspace (docs, forms, slides): Build quizzes, surveys or interactive slide shows.
- Canva (free version): Create graphics for training guides or role-play cards.
- Edpuzzle: Take a training video and embed quiz questions to test comprehension.
- Flip (formerly Flipgrid): Invite staff to record video responses to prompts like,

"Describe how you would calm a suicidal caller."

- YouTube (unlisted or private channels): Host internal training videos, refresher lessons or video SOP walkthroughs.

Many learning management systems (LMS) also offer free tiers that support basic course building. Moodle, for example, is open-source and highly customizable.

We need training that reflects the real-time, high-stakes environment our teams work in every day.

SCENARIOS THAT WORK: EXAMPLES FROM THE FIELD

Scenario 1: The Elevator Entrapment Drill: A telecommunicator-in-training practices handling an elevator rescue involving a non-English-speaking caller. The exercise uses an interactive decision-making activity where the trainee selects how to proceed at each step — such as when to use a language line or what questions to ask next. Each decision leads to a different outcome, helping the trainee see how correct procedures guide the call to a safe resolution while missteps reveal common pitfalls.

Scenario 2: The Code Blue Conundrum: Your agency is redefining when police respond to medical calls. Using a program like Kahoot or Quizizz, the trainer creates a quiz-style game with scenario-based questions: "You receive a call where CPR is already in progress. Which agency do you dispatch first?" Trainers can use leaderboard scores to foster competition or small-group debate.

Scenario 3: The Radio Traffic Breakdown: Supervisors use recorded radio audio from a major incident to build a short review activity. Staff listen to the traffic, then answer

questions on tone, clarity, sequence and officer safety considerations using an online quiz or shared discussion platform.

These types of activities not only test knowledge but also foster critical thinking, decision-making and confidence — and they can be built in-house using tools your agency may already have.

MAKING TRAINING FUN AND MAKING IT STICK!

Let's not forget that adult learners need engagement to retain information. Here are a few innovative (and budget-friendly) ways to make training more memorable:

- Dispatch bingo: Create cards with training objectives ("de-escalation cue used," "CAD note flagged correctly"). Staff mark them off during live calls or simulations.
- Policy escape rooms: Use Google Forms to build a digital escape room where dispatchers must "escape" a QA audit by correctly applying policy.
- Peer review rounds: Record mock calls and have peers evaluate one another using a rubric.
- Virtual ride-alongs: Pair dispatchers with bodycam footage or CAD playback and have them narrate the radio response as if they were on shift.

These activities work best when there is space to work off the floor; even a 60-minute session away from the console can improve retention and morale. For new training academies, blending classroom instruction with interactive media helps accommodate diverse learning styles and keeps long training days from dragging.

HOW TO START: A STEP-BY-STEP GAME PLAN

1. Assess your needs: What training gaps exist? What's causing the most QA issues?
2. Choose a platform: Start with tools your agency already uses. If you use PowerPoint, try converting a slide deck into a gamified quiz.
3. Build one lesson: Don't overwhelm yourself. Pick one topic (e.g., TTY calls or suspicious activity reports) and create an interactive version.
4. Test and tweak: Pilot the new training with a small group and gather feedback.
5. Share and repeat: Invite other trainers or supervisors to create content. Build a shared folder or internal training library.

MEASURING SUCCESS

To prove the value of instructional tech, track metrics like:

- Quiz completion rates.
- Scenario pass/fail rates.
- Reduction in repeat QA errors.
- Employee satisfaction via post-training surveys.

Don't forget to celebrate wins! Feature "Top Scorers" or "Most Improved" on your center's bulletin board or in a newsletter.

TRAINING THAT WORKS IN REAL LIFE

Instructional technology isn't just about cool apps; it's about building confident, competent responders in an increasingly complex world. Whether you're onboarding a new telecommunicator or refreshing a senior call taker, interactive learning makes lessons stick. And when staff are engaged, they're more prepared, more accurate and more connected to the mission.

Start small. Keep it simple. And make it meaningful. ●

Michael DeOrion is a seasoned public safety communications professional with over 17 years in 9-1-1 dispatch operations and training. He currently serves as a Communications Center Manager in California and is passionate about bringing modern, tech-enabled learning strategies to public safety professionals across all roles.

CDE EXAM #77089

1. Instructional technology in 9-1-1 training is only effective when high-cost tools and software are used.
 - a. True
 - b. False
2. Which of the following is a benefit of using simulations in dispatcher training?
 - a. Reduces staffing costs
 - b. Replaces classroom instruction entirely
 - c. Provides realistic, risk-free scenario practice
 - d. Automatically updates agency policy
3. In the "Elevator Entrapment" scenario, what instructional method was used to guide the trainee?
 - a. Role-play in person
 - b. Flashcard memorization
 - c. Branching simulation with multiple outcomes
 - d. PowerPoint presentation
4. Which tool can be used to embed quiz questions into training videos?
 - a. Canva
 - b. Edpuzzle
 - c. Google Slides
 - d. Jamboard
5. Interactive training tools like Kahoot and Quizizz can promote engagement and competition among staff.
 - a. True
 - b. False
6. What is one example of a low-cost way to make policy training more engaging?
 - a. Purchasing a VR simulator
 - b. Hosting a conference
 - c. Building a digital escape room with Google Forms
 - d. Hiring an outside vendor for every training
7. What is the primary reason to incorporate peer review rounds into dispatcher training?
 - a. To assign blame
 - b. To evaluate supervisors
 - c. To encourage collaborative evaluation and critical listening
 - d. To replace quality assurance (QA) evaluations
8. Which of the following is a key metric for evaluating the success of instructional technology implementation?
 - a. The number of staff complaints
 - b. Budget surplus after implementation
 - c. Scenario pass/fail rates and employee satisfaction
 - d. Average length of staff meetings
9. Agencies have access to various training tools, including Canva and Edpuzzle, but they come with substantial costs.
 - a. True
 - b. False
10. True or False: Blending traditional instruction with interactive media is especially helpful for new academies and accommodates diverse learning styles.
 - a. True
 - b. False

FOR CREDIT TOWARD APCO RECERTIFICATION(S)

Each CDE article is equal to one credit hour of continuing education

1. Study the CDE article in this issue.
2. Answer the test questions online (see below for online exam instructions) or on the exam page from the magazine article (photocopies are not required).
3. Add/upload your CDE article information and certificate of achievement in the "My Classes Taken" section of APCO's Training Central at www.apcointl.org/trainingcentral.

Questions? Call us at (386) 322-2500.

You can access the CDE exam online! To receive a complimentary certificate of completion, you may take the CDE exam online. Go to <https://www.training-apcointl.org/> to create your username and password. Enter CDE in the search box, and click on the "Logging In," then click on "enroll me" and choose "Logging In (77089)" to begin the exam. Upon successful completion of the quiz, a certificate of achievement will be available for download/printing.